

International University of Japan Top Global University Project Symposium  
From Minamiuonuma to the World—Creating a Prosperous Community and Future—  
Event Report

- Date : Wednesday, August 24, 2022 14:00~17:30 pm
- Venue : Main Hall, Minamiuonuma Civic Hall
- Participants : Around 160, both online and at the venue

On Wednesday, August 24, International University of Japan and Minamiuonuma City jointly hosted a symposium entitled “From Minamiuonuma to the World—Creating a Prosperous Community and Future—” as part of the Top Global University Project.

Focusing on themes including “regional development,” “globalization,” “multicultural coexistence,” and “business creation,” we invited people from industry, government, academia, and the private sector to discuss sustainable regional development and the role of foreign nationals in local communities. This was an occasion for everyone to learn from the experiences of others, and to pool their thoughts in envisaging the kind of prosperous community development where people can live together in harmony.

## < Program overview >

### Opening Remarks

#### 【Hiroyuki Itami, President of International University of Japan】

I am delighted that we are able to hold this symposium today as part of the Top Global University Project.

The theme of this symposium, “From Minamiuonuma to the World,” is a very important theme for our university, and in November 2021, we announced our vision for the future of IUJ. In addition to the existing mission of “fostering global human resources,” the university has set “fostering human resources for international cooperation” as an additional mission. With these two missions in

mind, we came up with the following concepts that define our university: “a place to learn about the world and Japan,” “a place where the world cooperates,” and “a university that blends in with Niigata and Minamiuonuma.”

The third concept is also a testament to the process of self-reflection we have undertaken as a university, as well as a kind of declaration. Our university is quite unique in that nearly 90% of our students are international students, and we are a university that only has a graduate school. Since the majority of our



students are international students who can barely speak Japanese, it is easy to create invisible barriers between us and the local community. Therefore, we have created a vision for the future in the hope of somehow resolving this issue and becoming an integral part of Minamiuonuma.

In addition to the campus in Minamiuonuma, IUJ has its Global Communication Center (GLOCOM) in Roppongi, Tokyo. Today's event is moderated by GLOCOM researchers, making it a truly university-wide symposium. I hope that the symposium will provide a forum for in-depth discussions, and that those who were not able to attend in person today will be able to experience the atmosphere of the symposium in a real and human way.

### **Lecture “Sustainable Development and the Future of Minamiuonuma City”**

#### **【Sigeo Hayashi, Mayor of Minamiuonuma City】**

Minamiuonuma City has been involved in a variety of initiatives. One such example is “Noh/KNOW THE FUTURE,” a promotional video starring young farmers from the city, for which they also took charge of the filming and music production. In addition, we have been handing out Minamiuonuma rice as business cards, and developing rice gift items in collaboration with the Tokyo National Museum.



I have made the utilization of snow my main theme as mayor of Minamiuonuma. For example, during my term as mayor, we organized for Minamiuonuma's snow to be brought to Olympic and Paralympic-related events for people to enjoy, and are working to industrialize yukimuro, a traditional storage method that utilizes the cold air of snow. Currently, the city is working to entice data centers to locate here, with the idea of using snow to cool the data servers.

Minamiuonuma City is doing well in terms of hometown tax payments. In fiscal 2021, the city's hometown tax payment totaled 4.5 billion yen, ranking first in Niigata Prefecture. Here, too, yukimuro-themed return gifts for those who made a payment through the hometown tax system generated a great deal of interest, reminding us once again of the high brand power of snow. We believe that by building up pride in our brand reputation for having the finest rice and snow in Japan, and by planning and holding various promotional events, we will become a force to be reckoned with in the global eye.

We are also starting a human resource development project supported by a donation from a businessman from Minamiuonuma City. As such, we hope that this project will give birth to the next generation of young entrepreneurs with their sights set on the world. As part of this effort, the Minamiuonuma City Business Emergence Base opened at Muikamachi Station. We are aiming to nurture entrepreneurs by having all so-called “community development” meetings held here.

In addition, we believe that scattered among our various activities are many elements through which we can connect with the world, such as the revitalization of our local satoyama landscapes and the operation of a store dedicated to mobile sales in cooperation with Lawson (Lawson's first such trial). As such, I look forward to building a sustainable future for this region in cooperation with the International University of Japan.

### **Lecture “Destination Marketing”**

**【Mr. Tomohiro Muraki, President of Intheory, Inc.】**

Destination marketing means rediscovering the good things about an area and connecting them to a larger number of people to create a flow of visitors to the area. To do this, the value and attractiveness of the region must be properly communicated and disseminated to increase the number of people who want to visit.



In 2016, an organization was formed to launch the Setouchi area domestically and internationally, and I was responsible for marketing. At the time, there was no destination called “Setouchi,” and the process began with figuring out how to make it known both domestically and internationally. First, we worked to have the Setouchi area listed in the New York Times, an authoritative global media publication, as one of the “52 Destinations of the Year,” and one year later, it was listed as the “Setouchi Islands.” The area also ranked first in National Geographic Traveler’s “Destinations to Visit in 2019,” and as a result of these efforts, the number of visitors to the Setouchi area has increased about fourfold in the four years since 2016. Consequently, the region began to change, and businesses offering a variety of new products and services emerged. In other words, the eagerness of new businesses has changed dramatically. When new services are created, they themselves also transmit the value of the Setouchi area to the outside world, creating a cycle of growth.

In order for Minamiuonuma to remain an attractive region, it must become a place that people want to visit. Winning a global reputation is one extremely effective way to achieve this. Another essential step is to create a digital environment. This digital shift is progressing among consumers, but are local operators keeping up? According to an ATTA survey, about 60% of businesses already have online reservation payment capabilities, and 51% of businesses actually attract customers online. In other words, 51% of sales come from online. This shows the importance of having an ultra-digital environment.

In addition, in order to attract travelers, it is very important to know what travelers are looking for. The shortcut is to know what the media, which are most sensitive to this and reflect it in the information they disseminate, are thinking and seeking. One of the major media trends driving travel trends is the tendency to focus on the daily life of the region and its natural environment as it is. This indicates that affluent travelers are also finding value in eco-tourism and being sustainable, a fact that is shown by the growing popularity of responsible tourism as advocated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Applying this to Minamiuonuma, the local landscape, nature and culture along with life in this snowy region itself attracts the interest of travelers. The town’s history and culture as a rice-growing village, the food culture nurtured there, and the daily life of the region all attract travelers from around the world. By taking this to the next level, and then taking it overseas, we can gain the appreciation of people who have not yet come to appreciate Japan or its culture.

Finally, some people are put off by the inclusion of global influences or technology, but we should never limit the possibilities of our region, and we should



thoroughly learn and test all options and methodologies, both domestic and international, and if we think this is a good idea, we will do it until we get results. If you feel that this is the way to go, you must do it thoroughly until it produces results. I urge you to take the initiative in your marketing activities, which are indispensable for community development.

**Q & A**

**Question (question for Mr. Muraki from participant) :**

I would like to ask Mr. Muraki a question. When wealthy people from overseas come to Japan, the biggest problem they face is the lack of hotels in the appropriate price range for their needs. Although there are hotels that charge 30,000 to 40,000 yen, you cannot make the region a tourist destination for them unless there are hotels that charge in the 100,000 yen range. Did you have any difficulties in finding accommodation facilities in the Setouchi area when you were developing the project? Or, conversely, were you able to attract guests by selling the sustainability aspect?



**Mr. Muraki, Intheory, Inc. :**

It's a very important issue. I think your point is correct.

I would like to mention two things. One is that just because we don't have something now, it doesn't mean we can't do something about it. Ten years ago, Setouchi did not have enough to meet the needs of overseas visitors and seasoned travelers, but now various things are available. Step by step, by steadily carrying out activities like the ones we are doing now, people will come and needs will arise. Then, more and more new people and people who start services will think of it as a business. In the process, a flow of capital will come in to meet this great need. Last year, one inn branded by Zecca, the founder of Amanresort, was finally launched in the Setouchi area. From our point of view, it took ten years, but we felt that we had finally reached this point. Even if you don't have appropriate hotels now, rest assured that this kind of initiative will surely make the area a destination of choice and attract new people who want to launch new services.

Just one more thing, then, what do we do now? Wealthy people perceive luxury accommodations for comfort and those that are simply a local experience as two separate things. They stay at places that cost 50,000 to 100,000 yen per night, but on the other hand, they also stay at ordinary farmhouses. It would be good if we could first create an environment in Minamiuonuma where such places are properly arranged and delivered to travelers. By doing so, gradually, step by step, something like what I mentioned earlier could happen.



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## Panel Discussion① “Solving local issues in Minamiuonuma by Minamiuonuma for Minamiuonuma”

- Moderator : Mr. Eiki Kikuchi, Research Fellow / Assistant Professor, the Center for Global Communications (GLOCOM), IUJ
- Panelists ;
  - Ms. Tomoko Sakai, CEO, Sakaiorimono, Inc.
  - Mr. Keisuke Kurogi, Advisor, Minamiuonuma City Marketing and Development Organization
  - Mr. Tomohiro Muraki, President, Intheory, Inc.
  - Mr. Takuya Yamagata, Consultant, Code for Japan
  - Mr. Masahiko Shoji, Professor, Faculty of Sociology, Musashi University / Executive Research Fellow, the Center for Global Communications (GLOCOM), IUJ

### **Kikuchi :**

Here, we would like to consider ways in which we could create the kind of society in which local people solve local problems while utilizing local resources, and in which money and know-how are accumulated in the community through this process. Today, we have prepared three issues for discussion.

We would like to start off with a discussion on the first issue, namely, what is needed for local communities to solve local issues on their own. But before we begin, I would like to ask the panelists to introduce themselves and briefly mention a few key words for today’s discussions.



### **Sakai (hereinafter without titles) :**

Our company was founded in 1933 in Shiozawa, Minamiuonuma City, Niigata Prefecture, and is a kimono fabric manufacturer making traditional crafts such as Hon Shiozawa and Shiozawa Tsumugi. Even in today’s increasingly efficient world, we continue to carry on our local culture by doing everything by hand.

Feeling the respect and esteem that overseas people have for Japanese culture, we ventured out to European exhibitions about seven years ago, and in the first year began doing business with the royal gift shop in Spain. We brought Japanese kimono culture and ethnic kimono fabrics as tangible items, and we got a strong sense that people over there were attracted to the spirituality possessed by the Japanese people and the culture that has been nurtured in the region, and that it was this that led to sales opportunities. We also brought brochures of Minamiuonuma City and displayed them at the booth, introducing Minamiuonuma’s snowy landscape, rice, and sake along with the products we sold.



Then the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and Japan closed its doors to overseas visitors. So, in an effort

to let everyone in Japan know the good qualities of Minamiuonuma, we began to try various things in addition to selling rolls of fabrics. For example, we held an opera at the civic center, inviting the performers to wear kimonos, and inviting the audience to pull out kimonos that have been sitting in their wardrobes and come along wearing them. Another recent initiative we have begun goes under the name of “Wa-Treat.” Kankoji Temple in Shiozawa enshrines Nanpo Inari, the god of sericulture. Therefore, we have started an initiative to have people do yoga at Kankoji Temple, experience culture with artisans at our company, and enjoy local foods over a cup of tea. As a company, we are still steadily carrying on traditional culture even in this age of streamlining and the metaverse. I do what I can to promote the charm of the region through textile culture.

We proposed “Thanks with Love” as one of the key words to promote Minamiuonuma, as the value of our company’s existence is based on the lives of the people in the production area.

**Kurogi :**

I was born in Miyazaki, grew up in Yokohama, and continue to work for a securities company in Tokyo as my day job. I first came into contact with Minamiuonuma when I was allowed to go on a company-sponsored study program at the International University of Japan in 2017. I enrolled in the Graduate School of International Management, which in my opinion is an MBA program where one can study while experiencing the most global environment in Japan. I spent two years living and sleeping with students from about 50 countries around the world, and I joined the student association and engaged in various activities from the moment I first enrolled in the program, hoping to experience management in a global environment.



One of the biggest challenges was interaction with the local community. While out drinking in Muikamachi in my free time, I made connections with local people, and with their help, I was able to organize large-scale international exchange events between international students from IUJ and local residents. This is why, after completing the program, I have continued to be involved at Minamiuonuma City Hall, and in addition to my main job, I am helping to increase the number of people with connections to Minamiuonuma City through the Minamiuonuma City Marketing and Development Organization.

My key word for solving local problems is “tolerance.” Speaking from my own experience, I came to Minamiuonuma as an outsider, a young person in my 30s, and a fool doing crazy things. I mention “tolerance” because the people of Minamiuonuma have generously accepted and supported me, which has made it possible for me to participate in a variety of events and initiatives.



**Muraki :**

I mentioned “demand creation” as a keyword, but I want to change it. I thought “Tomoko Sakai” was a good choice. With someone like Ms. Sakai, demand can be created. I am sure you understood from my earlier lecture that demand creation is essential, but the question is how to do it. After all, unless local people talk about their own charms, they will not resonate with people’s hearts, and demand will not be created. After today’s preliminary meeting and listening to the first speech, I thought, oh, if only we had someone like this, we would be all right. So, the key is how to create the second and third Mr. Sakais in this region.

**Yamagata :**

I was a government employee in Mori Town, Hokkaido for 24 years. I became independent last December and have been involved in many things regarding local affairs while working with Code for Japan. Part of the reason I quit my job was that I felt that in order to do things for my town, I needed to do more than just work for the government. And because I love my town, I think I need to look at the community as a whole. A variety of activities are being steadily carried out in the community, such as IT for children and workshops using digital devices.

My key word is “I care, but I don’t care.” The more we try to do something new, the more we are told various things. When people say various things to me, I think it is better not to care about it, even though I do care about it. I shut out all such voices and just give it a try. I think that taking on challenges is a very important point.

**Shoji :**

I am researching how information technology can be used to improve local communities. Today, I would like to talk from the perspective of how we can successfully manage local communities while also using technology. I am working to create a society in which local communities can manage and operate their own affairs by fully harnessing and utilizing the power of the various resources that are available in the local community, including people, goods, money, and information.

My key word is “multiple belonging.” As I work at IUJ and travel back and forth between Tokyo and Minamiuonuma City, this is the one place in Niigata Prefecture that I have a connection with. I myself am a so-called person who has developed a connection with Minamiuonuma, so if something were to happen in Niigata, the place I would be most concerned about would be Minamiuonuma. If the people of Minamiuonuma were to go to Tokyo or some other region of Japan, or perhaps to another part of the world, and get deeply involved with the local community there, I am sure that the people of that region would in turn feel inspired to come here and get deeply involved as well. I would like to talk today about how we can build the kinds of relationships in which we create these deep connections with each other, so that people in Minamiuonuma also have the opportunity of belonging to various other places, rather than just having people from other areas belonging to Minamiuonuma.



**Kikuchi :**

First of all, regarding “multiple belonging,” Mr. Sakai, you yourself are in a situation where you can be said to belong to multiple areas.

**Sakai :**

I grew up in Minamiuonuma, where I lived until high school. After that, I went to school in the Tokyo metropolitan area and lived there. I had no plans to take over the family business, but my father passed away suddenly, and I found myself living in two locations, in Minamiuonuma and Tokyo.

The phrase “I care, but I don’t care” really struck a chord with me. In the kimono industry, there is a trend that weavers are not allowed to sell directly to customers, and although I was told many things, I opened a showroom in Tokyo. I am a member of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry-approved Association for the Promotion of Tradition, and I have been involved in a number of other related activities. Besides, when something comes up, I make an appointment with the mayor and visit him at City Hall. In many respects, I belong to multiple places.

**Kikuchi :**

The fact that everyone at City Hall warmly accepts you, Mr. Sakai, may be an example of so-called “tolerance.” But do you think this area is truly tolerant?

**Shoji :**

“Tolerance” is necessary to make a community a place where people of all walks of life can take on new challenges, but I imagine that there are some aspects that are rather “less tolerant,” along the lines of “I care, but I don’t care.”

**Sakai :**



At the end of the day, there are many old-fashioned people living here, so they know everything about other people's business. As long as someone lives a normal, unassuming life helping out at home without any fuss, nobody says anything about them. However, just as the saying goes, "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down," if someone did something a little unusual, you would hear things like "that girl/boy used to be like this or that," the kinds of things that you had long forgotten about but which looking back now are amusing. I was concerned about whether City Hall would listen to the voices of ordinary people, especially those who do not have a certificate of residence in Minamiuonuma City, but the mayor is keen to take action that will improve this community, and I consult with him on various matters. In this aspect, I think he is very tolerant.

**Kikuchi :**

Here, I would like us to focus our discussion on solutions to issues unique to Minamiuonuma. First, I would like to briefly introduce to you the results of the "Minamiuonuma Mirai Ideathon" workshop that IUJ recently held on July 30 at the Minamiuonuma City Business Emergence Base. This was an event to think about the future of Minamiuonuma together with mainly residents and business owners in Minamiuonuma.

– “Minamiuonuma Mirai (Future) Ideathon” Report –

Issues specific to Minamiuonuma

(Education and employment)

Decreasing number of schools due to population decrease, no schools nearby / no job opportunities / low salaries / few attractive companies and companies to work for

(Daily life)

To shop, you have to go to Nagaoka / few cafes / lots of snow causes inconvenience / snow removal

(Traffic and transportation)

Can't get around without a car / few transportation options

(Economic activity)

Creation of opportunities for local economic circulation / coexistence of large commercial facilities and local stores / few specialty stores

(Domestic and inbound tourism)

Lack of ability to communicate local resources other than rice and sake

(Other)

Few people returning to the area after having completed higher education / aging population, increase in elderly-only households / many suicides / few women / high divorce rate

Lack of unity among Urasa, Shiozawa, and Muikamachi / lack of spirit of motivation due to affluence

Resources through which to generate appeal

Snow / nature such as mountains and rivers / rice / Japanese sake / shiitake mushrooms / four distinct seasons / ideal child-rearing environment / close to Tokyo / good sense of morals

How can we use these resources to solve issues

All participants came up with a solution (vision) while having students from IUJ's International Social Entrepreneurship Program speak as well

Idea 1

(Issue) Lack of local brand power

(Solution) Emphasize the ease of raising children and encourage a U-turn rush of young people

Idea 2

(Issue) Lack of employment opportunities

(Solution) Create a trading company by utilizing talented international students at IUJ

Idea 3

(Issue) Lack of transportation

(Solution) Propose a travel plan that emphasizes the aspects of the trip that can be enjoyed without a car

Idea 4

(Issues) Inconvenient winter living, lack of spirit of motivation due to affluence

(Solution) Launch Dohamari Uo “Numa” slogan campaign to generate appeal in the area

**Kikuchi :**

Once again, I would like to ask you all what kind of solutions you can come up with that are unique to Minamiuonuma.

**Kurogi :**

It is important to globally disseminate edgy products that only Minamiuonuma can offer, and in order to do so, it is necessary to incorporate people who are interested in Minamiuonuma and who have visited the area at least once as someone who has developed a connection with the area. The challenge is not to work with the vested interests of the past, but to change, to take on challenges, and to tackle new things.

**Sakai :**

昔 Long ago, before the ski industry entered the area, Minamiuonuma had a textile industry. It is without a doubt the power of women that has supported this industry. We would like to put the spotlight on such aspects and communicate them from a global perspective. We simply think that such an initiative would be interesting.

(Applause from the audience)

**Kikuchi :**

Although I'm afraid that conservative and old-fashioned values may be a stumbling block to the next stage of the project.

**Yamagata :**

When we try to do something a little different, we are always met with negative comments, but I think the important standpoint here is not to worry about it, but to create things and change things.

**Muraki :**

When I was asked to speak at this event, I naturally did some research on Minamiuonuma City. The first picture I found in an image search that I thought, "Oh, I like this," was an Instagram photo from the Woman's Power of Minamiuonuma City Tourism Promotion Team. I have felt that, in many ways, creating opportunities for women to play an active role will change the stagnant old state of affairs. We currently have a team of agents with partnerships in six countries, and 80% of the staff are women. These women are playing an active role, and together we are producing results such as the case in Setouchi. On the other hand, when I return to Japan and attend regional meetings, most of the participants are men, and there are even meetings where 100% of the participants are men. I think it is very important for everyone to be aware of the importance of creating opportunities for women to play more active roles.

**Kikuchi :**

I would like to ask a question to Mr. Shoji as well. I wonder if the power of ICT, information technology, could do something to boost such areas where people are actually working hard in the community but not

seeing the light of day.

**Shoji :**

Ms. Sakai just mentioned how the mayor listens to people who do not have a certificate of residence in Minamiuonuma City. However, Mr. Kikuchi and I have been involved in community development in areas where we do not have a certificate of residence, and we are having a very hard time dealing with the difference in treatment between those who have a certificate of residence and those who do not. I think that people who think of things, say various things, and work for the good of community because they care for its wellbeing are not citizens in the administrative sense; rather, they are good friends. In terms of valuing connections with related persons, we can make great use of today's social media and the Internet. Trying to do something with just the people here is a challenge, and I think we should use what we have available to strengthen our connections to solve this problem.

**Kikuchi :**

What you just said very much applies to Mr. Kurogi. Is it correct to say that Mr. Kurogi spent so much time out drinking while at graduate school that, and as a result, he is still asked to be half involved in Minamiuonuma, even after completing his studies?

**Kurogi :**

I was studying a great deal and drinking in spare moments in between classes, but in a nutshell, that's exactly what I was doing. I don't have a hometown, but for the first time, there were people in this town who said, "Welcome back!" That is why I stayed here.

**Kikuchi :**

I think it is very important to increase the number of people who get deeply involved in the community once and then come back regularly to do something together, but I would like to have some specific ideas for solutions specific to Minamiuonuma.

**Kurogi :**

We would like to invite IUJ alumni, especially those still in Japan, to pay another visit to Minamiuonuma. These alumni want to contribute to Minamiuonuma in some way with their respective areas of expertise, but do not know where to go or to who to approach. Since I am currently the vice president of the IUJ Alumni Association, I would like to bridge this gap and take action to encourage people to come back to Minamiuonuma.

**Yamagata :**

Don't just wait around, but go. Go to see the people had the chance to meet, even if for a moment, and talk, drink, eat, and laugh with them. Just go and socialize. I think this is very important.

**Shoji :**

Please create opportunities to invite over those who you have formed a relationship with. Come on over! It is easier for people to come if you throw an invitation at them. This will help to get the relationship building process going.

**Muraki :**

Ideas of what to do keep coming, but the question is who will do it, when will it be done, and what resources will be available. If this is not followed through on, it ends up being a story that never comes to fruition. All of these things will come to nothing unless there is an organization there to take responsibility and do the work to promote the initiatives. In particular, measures to encourage people to come and get involved in the community or measures to enable people to settle in the community are very time-consuming tasks. If you don't develop a system and human resources that can work over a long period of time, you won't get results. It is a job that will not produce results unless the foundation is solidified, so I would like you to work to create such a system in this region.

**Sakai :**

Many people have a negative image of regions which experience heavy snowfall and snow itself. In fact, I am one of them. I would be very interested in hearing your various ideas after you have experienced life in Minamiuonuma in winter.

**Kikuchi :**

As the final point of discussion, I would like us to focus on what the International University of Japan can do to contribute to solving regional issues specific to Minamiuonuma.

**Shoji :**

I am interested in living surrounded by snow in winter and would rather spend my time in two meters of snow. I would like the International University of Japan to create opportunities for people such as me to come and experience this. Another thing I would like to ask is if it would be possible to create opportunities for people from Minamiuonuma to go out into the world. If we could help create such a deep relationship in which people from Minamiuonuma or company employees stayed in the hometowns of alumni, they would feel as if they had stayed in that city for a while, and the world would expand.

**Yamagata :**

In my own experience of working in local government, when I was struggling with an issue that I really wanted to solve, my boss at the time said to me, "Why do you think we have a university in the community? Go talk to the university and ask them to solve the problem together." This was a revelation to me. If there is a seed of something in the community, you should go and talk to the university and get a variety of viewpoints. This is the strength of having a university in the community.

**Muraki :**

I have been doing work within local government for a long time and have only been in the world of tourism for 10 years. I spent several years asking people who were promoting tourism in Japan and abroad about their experiences. Japan as seen from abroad is something we on the Japanese side do not notice, and I was often given the opportunity to gain insights into how Japan is perceived. I have heard that more than 80% of the students at IUJ are from overseas, and I would like to encourage them to overcome the language barrier and actively interact with local people. It is an opportunity for us to gain an objective perspective on how Japan and Minamiuonuma City are seen from the perspective of different countries. For international students, I believe that the few years they spend in Minamiuonuma will be a wonderful experience filled with great memories. We would like you to create opportunities to actively encourage them to do so.

**Kurogi :**

We live in an age where diversification is required, one in which there is a need to rise above mediocrity. As such, the power of minorities is very important. In Minamiuonuma, foreign nationals are a huge minority, and I would like more people from the local community to venture into IUJ, where there are people from so many different countries. If you step into this university, you will become a minority. Here, the world spreads out before your very eyes, and if Japanese people act like Japanese people, they will seem weird. The IUJ cafeteria is open to everyone, so please step in and experience it for yourself. I hope that IUJ can create a place where visitors can experience IUJ as it really is. As one of the people involved in this project, I would like to continue to actively communicate and relay information.

**Sakai :**

If people from other places actively interact with the young people who will lead Minamiuonuma in the future, I think you will help the children develop a variety of values and make Minamiuonuma an even better place to live. We hope that you will take the opportunity to interact with children.

**Q & A****Question :**

I would like to correct something you said. In fact, IUJ has been working to solve the unique challenges facing Minamiuonuma City. We have everything we need in terms of achievements and human resources. What is missing is the significance of what we have been doing. In that sense, I would like to ask the moderator for his view on how GLOCOM, with its two bases, can develop in Uonuma, and furthermore, how it can develop in terms of fostering global social entrepreneurs.

**Kikuchi :**

You are right. GLOCOM is located in Roppongi, and to be honest, the distance between GLOCOM and Minamiuonuma has been considerable. In terms of collective effort as an organization, we, the International University of Japan, have certainly made a variety of efforts in the past, but I think the time has come for us to take things to the next level. I think it is necessary for IUJ Urasa and Roppongi to work together in the last



mile, from the creation of a local informatization or snow removal application to allowing the citizens of Minamiuonuma to experience the benefits of such a project.

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### **Panel Discussion② “Activities of foreigners in local communities”**

- Moderator : Ms. Naho Kobayashi, Senior Research Fellow, the Center for Global Communications (GLOCOM), IUJ
- Panelists :
  - Mr. Kenichi Shishido, Vice President, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
  - Mr. Yoshio Takagi, President, Takagiya, Inc.
  - Mr. Laurence Kwek, current student of Graduate School of International Management, IUJ
  - Mr. Katsutoshi Koshigoe, General Manager, Department of Industrial Promotion, Minamiuonuma City

#### **Kobayashi :**

In this session, we would like to focus on enabling foreign nationals to take on a more active role in the community in the future. The point is that the addition of foreign nationals with different values and backgrounds to the community will create a new impetus for the problem-solving cycle through diversity and synergy between local residents and foreign nationals, which will lead to innovation in the community. We would like to hear your thoughts from the perspective of not only solving problems by bringing the negative to zero or maintaining the status quo, but also finding ways to involve foreigners in the growth and development of the community beyond that.



#### **Shishido (hereinafter without titles) :**

You might think of JICA as an organization that provides aid to developing countries, but for the past three years, it has been promoting projects that contribute to the integration of foreign nationals in local communities.

The number of foreign workers in Japan has increased 2.5 times in the 10 years from 2010 to 2020. However, while research shows that 6.74 million foreign workers will be needed by 2040 to maintain Japan’s industries, our simulations suggest that other Asian countries will also experience population aging, and the wage gap is narrowing as their economies grow, meaning that Japan will not be able to entice enough foreign workers to come and work here when it needs them. Our study group believes that we must



create a society in which foreign nationals can have dreams and play an active role in Japan with peace of

mind, and we advocate the strategic use of international cooperation in order to make Japan the country of choice and a more open country. In addition, many foreign workers who come to Japan have a certain level of education, and it is necessary to increase the volume zone among such people who want to come to Japan. What it more, human resources to support a diverse society will be needed more than ever.

For Japan to be a country of choice, one major keyword is the issue of human rights. At the root of the problem is the asymmetry of information between foreign nationals and the people of Japan. We have started a pilot program to disseminate information on daily life in Japan and a consultation service for those who have no one close by to consult, and we are learning about the plight of foreign nationals who may otherwise slip through the safety net. We are also promoting interaction with Japanese people outside of the workplace through an exchange website.

**Koshioge :**

I would like to briefly introduce the current situation in Minamiuonuma City. Minamiuonuma City has long been recognized in Niigata Prefecture as a town with many foreign nationals. This is because, after all, it is home to IUJ, and international students from all over the world have lived there.

Looking at data on the working environment for foreign nationals in Minamiuonuma City, the number of foreign workers is decreasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the number of businesses requiring foreign workers is increasing. The population is declining and the working-age population is also falling rapidly. Under such circumstances, it can be surmised that foreign workers are needed in every region. From this, we feel that the number of places where foreign nationals can work will increase greatly. In addition, looking at the data on the ratio of effective job offers in Minamiuonuma City, the number of workers has been depleted except for general office jobs. Depending on the conditions, there is a very high possibility that foreign nationals will come in and play an active role.



**Takagi :**

I am from Tokyo, and it was 30 years ago that I established a factory in Uonuma. When I first started out in business, I had great difficulty in recruiting employees due to the ski boom, and there was a time when we had foreign part-timers playing an active role, but from the perspective of corporate development, there was always a shortage of human and labor resources. Therefore, I established a cooperative association called the Kan-Etsu Foods Cooperative Association to introduce a training system at that time. The purpose was to rationalize logistics and accept foreign workers. It was then that I started the training system and became fully involved with foreign workers. The biggest reason why I have been able to run my business here for 30 years is because of the help of foreign nationals.



When the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, all of our business partners in Sanriku, to whom we had been extremely indebted, were swept away, which prompted us to expand our technical intern supervisory organization license, which has now expanded to include suppliers and sales partners throughout Japan. As the region expanded, the union also began hiring interpreters and stationing them as interpreters in areas where technical intern trainees are dispatched. A total of about 20 foreign interpreters now work as full-time employees throughout the country.

**Kwek :**

When I was a senior in college, I participated in the Saitama-Cebu Monozukuri Human Resource Development Project and learned about Japanese culture, thinking, and manufacturing, which led me to be hired by a Japanese company. The company where I found employment was a small company that made inspection equipment for solar power generation. As an engineer, I experienced various jobs in areas such as electrical equipment, software development, and optical design. As an engineer, I recognized the importance of management, and in order to learn it, I quit my job and enrolled in IUJ.



I would like to talk about three difficulties and hardships I experienced in Japan as a foreign national. First is the language barrier. When I first came to Japan, I could not speak Japanese at all, and I had a lot of difficulty communicating at work and in daily life. No matter how high my level of English was, it was very difficult to express my feelings if I could not speak Japanese. Next, I learned in the spring semester at IUJ that “Monozukuri is the same as Hitozukuri.” Human resource development is important for a company to succeed. I think we need to improve the skills of not only Japanese but also foreign employees. Finally, community integration. Foreign nationals need to learn about Japan and get used to it because the social environment in their home countries is completely different from that in Japan. I think it would be good if Japanese and non-Japanese people could communicate with each other more through various events so that they can learn and understand each other.

**Kobayashi :**

Your point about the importance of human resource development was very impressive. Although it is difficult for foreign nationals to draw a career path from a long perspective due to the time frame issue, I think you made this point from the point of view that you yourself have included working in Japan as an option based on your plan to build a career over a long span of time.

How do you see the perspective of human resource development? Could you tell us what you are doing to put this into practice, if anything?

**Takagi :**

At the end of the day, the first step is to learn Japanese. For technical intern trainees and specified technical trainees, we provide thorough Japanese language education for the first year. Manuals translated into their

native languages are prepared, but the main staff and part-timers who teach this content speak in Japanese (Uonuma dialect), so Japanese is a must. On the other hand, highly skilled employees have no major problems with Japanese, and they are able to receive the same thorough in-house training as regular Japanese employees.

**Shishido :**

The merits of coming to Japan and the needs of those who are young and want to develop their careers, those who want to come to Japan with their families and live a stable and secure life, and those who are willing to stay even for a short period of time, differ depending on their respective positions. It is important to develop human resources in terms of motivation for those who come to Japan. For example, some regions are planning a scholarship system that will allow people to obtain a bachelor's or master's degree while they are working.

**Kobayashi :**

Next, we would like to hear from the perspective of who can do what to solve the issues.

**Takagi :**

I am concerned that the depreciation of the yen will make people from overseas less willing to come to Japan. In such an environment, I believe that Japan must make efforts to be chosen by people from overseas. It would be good if we could make the food hygiene standards and ISO 22000 training that Takagiya has created into our strengths and make our manufacturing know-how into one of our attractions.

**Koshigoe :**

The issue of community is very big. CIRs have been invited to promote industry and tourism, and because they can speak Japanese, they have been accepted by people from various communities. The issue for the government is how to support language skills and provide basic lifestyle support and welfare services. The viewpoint of eliminating barriers in local communities is taking root among young people, and I think it will continue to progress more and more. While some generations have a closed mindset, I think it is important to create the groundwork for acceptance through dialogue, including ourselves.

**Shishido :**

Due to the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, there are many Nikkei in the northern Kanto and Tokai areas, mainly in the manufacturing industry. The second and third generations have already been born, but seeing examples of people with very low incomes, especially those who receive only low pensions due to the short number of years they have been paying pensions, and those with unreasonably low social security, we must consider the system, including reflection on the past, when accepting people on a long-term basis. It is necessary for everyone in the community to discuss and think about what form of system to use and what kind of people they would like to have come in. The important thing is how to build relationships with the people around them.

**Kobayashi :**

Finally, I would like to ask you to say a few words about the role you would like IUJ to play as a regional university.

**Takagi :**

The technical internship program handled by our management organization includes a correspondence course that enables foreign nationals to earn a degree from an Indonesian university, but I hope that there will be more opportunities for foreign nationals to receive an education in Japan.

**Koshigoe :**

IUJ already has ties with the local community and government, and naturally these ties will continue in the future. The city is actively encouraging Japanese entrepreneurs and young people to start their own businesses, and I would like to see an increase in the amount of time that talented international students from IUJ and young people from the local community can spend in contact with each other, with the hope that this relationship will expand in a global direction in the future.

**Shishido :**

This may be something that has already been done, but I would like to see the creation of opportunities for interns to discuss and empathize with the issues faced by local companies together, for example, or to provide opportunities for international students and technical interns from the same country to speak frankly and listen to their voices. IUJ students are a very important tool to connect with the world. They are an important local resource for promoting Minamiuonuma on the world stage.

**Kwek :**

IUJ has a rich cultural diversity, with students from 50 countries. What IUJ can do best is communicate. We need to communicate so that we can understand each other better and solve social problems. It is better for Japanese and non-Japanese residents to solve problems together rather than Japanese alone.

**Kobayashi :**

I was struck once again with the hope that IUJ can function as a platform for communication and learning. I hope we can continue to deepen our discussions through such opportunities in the future.

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## Closing Remarks

### 【Hiroshi Kato, Vice President of IUJ】

At the beginning of this session, President Itami stated that this event was initiated based on the university's own process of self-reflection. This event is part of our various attempts to reflect on the fact that we have not been fully integrated into the local community. We hope to continue this project over the long term. At the same time, we would like to continue to hold events that lead to concrete actions and results, rather than simply holding such an event once a year and thinking that it is the end of the process. We are determined to make steady efforts to do what we can to make a difference.



<Comments from the questionnaire (excerpts) >

- The contents of this symposium gave me a lot of hope for the future of Minamiuonuma.
- The participants had concrete discussions about precedents and solutions to local problems.
- I was able to hear about the regional development of Minamiuonuma based on actual experiences
- I was able to gain a new perspective on regional development.
- It was very informative to hear about the activities of foreign nationals in the local community from a non-university perspective.

etc.

End of Report